The Forms of the Rekhyt Bird during the New Kingdom

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Abstract

The main aim of this study is to investigate the scenes of the rekhyt bird, forms and positions of the rekhyt in the scenes and its indication. This is accomplished through the survey of the accessible scenes, and monuments, followed by a detailed examination of the source evidence. In essence, this study may be regarded as effective in the sense of providing a thorough examination of rekhyt bird accessible scenes and monuments involving its depiction.

Key words: Bird, Rekhyt, New Kingdom.

Introduction

The Rekhyt bird appeared for a period of over three thousand years, It is represented in both Egyptian art and the Egyptian language. The rekhyt can be identified by its characteristic short pointed bill, rounded head, long squared tail and especially by the long crest on its head. To the Egyptians the bird was referred to as *rekhyt*. They were often depicted in Egyptian art in papyrus marshes, perching on their nests. It is generally accepted that the *rekhyt* people are to be identified as the lowest class of society in ancient Egypt and have been called "subjects", "common people", "plebeians" or "mankind". However, other scholars have suggested that the *rekhyt* people were actually foreigners who had settled in Egypt.[1]

The first appearance of the rekhyt bird in Egyptian art was in the Protodynastic Period. The bird is depicted on the deck of a boat, on a fragment of slate palette known as the "Plover Palette", which is housed in the Egyptian Museum in Cairo.[2] The earliest depiction of the rekhyt bird during the Old Kingdom comes from the statue base of the pharaoh Djoser. This base, which is on display in the Egyptian Museum in Cairo, depicts three rekhyt birds, each with their wings intertwined, under the feet of the pharaoh.[3]

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[1] Griffith, Images of the Rekhyt from Ancient Egypt, AEM 38, Vol. 7, p. 45.

[2] Nibbi, *Lapwings and Libyans in Ancient Egypt*, p.4.

[3] Griffith, *Images of the Rekhyt from Ancient Egypt*, p.46.

One relief from an Old Kingdom mastaba that does stand out comes from the Fifth Dynasty mastaba of Nefer at Saqqara. Here the tomb owner is accompanied by his wife or daughter who holds a lotus blossom in one hand, while in the other she clutches a rekhyt bird by its wings. It has been suggested by Partick Houlihan [4] that the rekhyt in this depiction was a pet or plaything. He points out that children often carry their pet birds, the hoopoe being the most common, while accompanying their parents.

During the Middle Kingdom the depiction of the rekhyt bird was rare. The relief, which is on display in the Egyptian Museum in Cairo, depicts two images of Amenemhat I seated on his Sed-festival pavilion. Beneath the pavilion there are seven representations of the rekhyt bird in an act of praising. It is likely that there were originally nine birds depicted [5], but unfortunately the left side of the relief is missing. Nine in ancient Egypt was a significant number, which appears many times.[6]

The depictions of the rekhyt during the New Kingdom are numerous. The most common depiction of the rekhyt is the rekhyt rebus [7], which first makes an appearance during the reign of Hatshepsut and continues to be depicted through to the Graeco- Roman Period.[8] The most important element of the rebus is the rekhyt figure itself. The figure is usually depicted resting upon a hieroglyph in the shape of a basket, meaning “all”. This reminds one of the nests upon which the lapwing bird would commonly be seen by the ancient Egyptians.

Another element of the rebus is the hieroglyph in the shape of a five-pointed star, meaning “worship”, which is usually placed just in front of the face of the rekhyt figure. The act of worshipping is confirmed by the depiction of upraised human arms which often formpart of the rebus. While the simplest form of the rekhyt rebus depicts the lapwing bird withhuman arms raised, in an act of adoration, and wings pinned back, in an act of submission, it was possible to have variants.[9]

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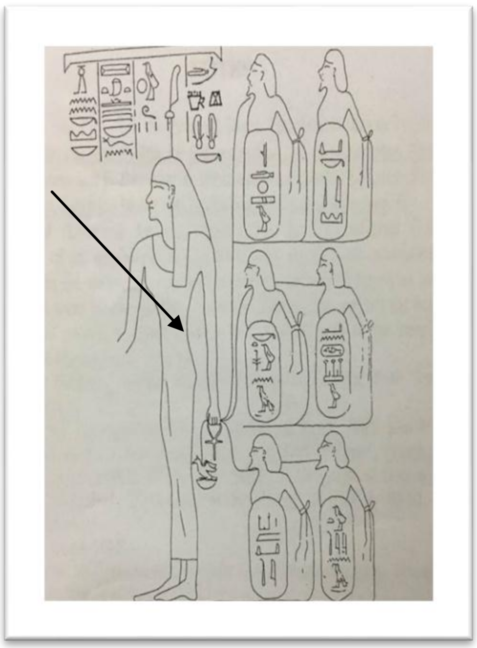
[4] Houlihan, *The Birds of Ancient Egypt*, p. 94.
[5] Wilkinson, *Symbols and magic in Egyptian art*, p. 127.
[6] Nibbi, A., *Lapwings and Libyans in Ancient Egypt*, pl. IX, p.124.
[7] **A rebus** is an artful intertwining or decorative arrangement of hieroglyphic and other pictorial elements. At first glance, a rebus looks like a picture, but it is meant to be read as a phrase or clause. The use of the rebus was fairly common in ancient Egypt, where writing and art were never really separated.
[8] Baines, *Temple Symbolism*, RAIN 15, p. 10.
[9] Griffith, *Archaeological Survey of Egypt*, P.130.

Forms of the Rekhyt Bird:-

During the New Kingdom the rekhyt bird was shown with many forms, Each form has its purpose and indication like:

A. Bird with two out stretched wings over "*nb*" sign.

This form appeared especially during the 18th dynasty. In this form the rekhyt appeared as a bird over "nb" sign which means all. The rekhyt appeared with two out stretched wings which refers to the loyalty and the respect. This form means "all people are under the control and pay loyalty to the king.[10]



Nibbi, *Rhy. t again*, Discussions in Egyptology, P. 44.

Goddess of the west is shown bringing the rubbed chiefs of the enemies. The frontal part of the rope is connected with the rekhyt bird which is upon the nb sign "all".

B. Human body over "nb" sign with the head of the rekhyt bird.

This form represented new form of the rekhyt bird appeared during the new kingdom.[11] In this form the rekhyt had human body standing over nb sign. In this form the rekhyt had two upraised arms for adoring.[12]

(10)Nibbi, Alessandra. *Discussions in Egyptology*.Oxbow Books, 2000.p. 44, fig. 3.
11 Cannata, *Current Research in Egyptology*, P.69.



Bell, *The New Kingdom Divine Temple* P.127.

Reconstructed column from the third tier of the temple of Hatshepsut at Deir el–Bahari

C. Bird

This form of the rekhyt was the main form of the rekhyt bird during the old and the middle kingdom. This form appeared rarly during the new kingdom as I mentioned. This form of the rekhyt bird appeared during the 18th,19th dynasty.[13] The main purpose of this form of the rekhyt bird was to refer to the rekhyt people. It gives us the idea of the loyalty and the control.[14]



أمنية نصر، *رخيت في الحضارةالمصرية* ، المنيا، ص٣٣

God Khnum is shown creating King Amenhotep III and his *Ka*. King Amenhotep III is shown holding arekhyt bird by his right hand.

[12] Naville, *The Temple of Deir el Bahar*, P.18 .

[13] Bell, *The New Kingdom Divine Temples*, in: temples of ancient Egypt, p.142, fig. 49.

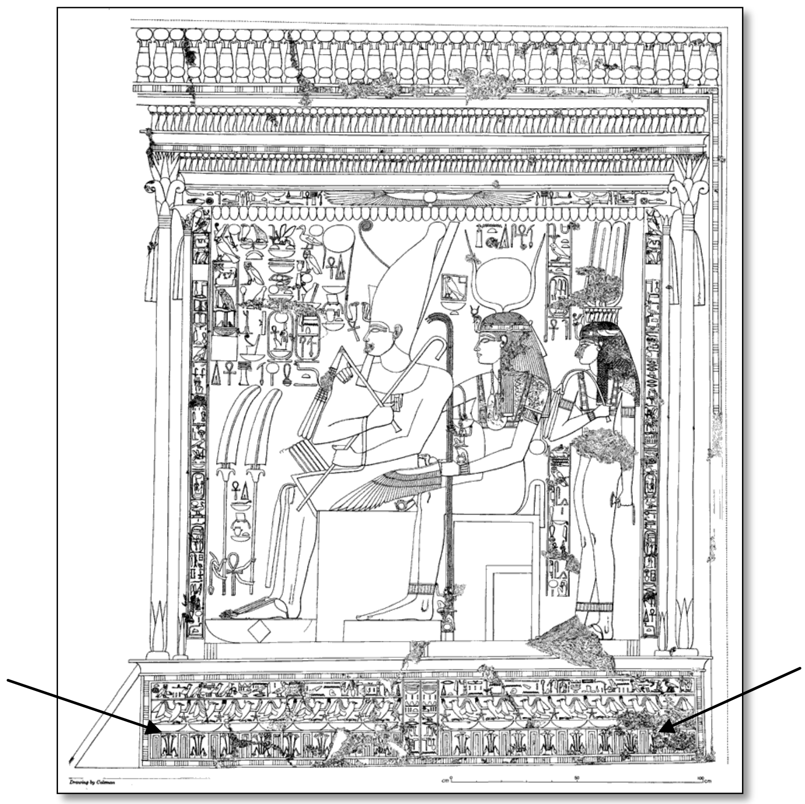
[14] سيد توفيق، أهم آثار الأقصر الفرعونية، القاهرة، ١٩٨٢، ص ٩٥.

D. Bird with two out stretched wings over nb sign with two upraised arms for adoration.

This form of the rekhyt bird was the most form appeared during the new kingdom.This form of the rekhyt bird was called "rekhyt rebus" which means that a photo can be read as phrase. The rekhyt rebus was firstly named by griffin.[15] The rekhyt rebus consists of three elements which are:-

- Rekhyt bird with two out stretched wings with two upraised arms for adoration.
- The hieroglyphic sign "*nb*" which means "all"
- The hieroglyphic sign "*dwa*" which means adore.

The all scene means "all people worship".



BENDERITTER, T. (n.d.).Tombs of Ancient Egypt. TT192, from http://www.osirisnet.net/e_centrale.htm

A relief from the tomb of Kheruef, depicts Amenhotep III with his wife Tiye behind them is goddess Hathor, The base of which has fourteen depictions of the rekhyt bird .

[15] Griffith, *Images of the Rekhyt from Ancient Egypt*, AEM 38, p.45-50.

This form appeared during the new kingdom especially 18th, 19th dynasty. The first appearance of this form was the new kingdom.[16]

E. Human figure with two upraised hands for adoring over "nb" sign with the crest of the rekhyt bird on the head.

This form of the rekhyt bird appeared during the new kingdom specially the 19th dynasty. In this form human figure appeared with two arms raised over "nb" sign with the crest of the rekhyt bird on the top of the head. The crest which appeared on the top of the head refers to the rekhyt bird that means this human figure refers to the rekhyt. This form means all the rekhyt people worship the king and under the control.[17]



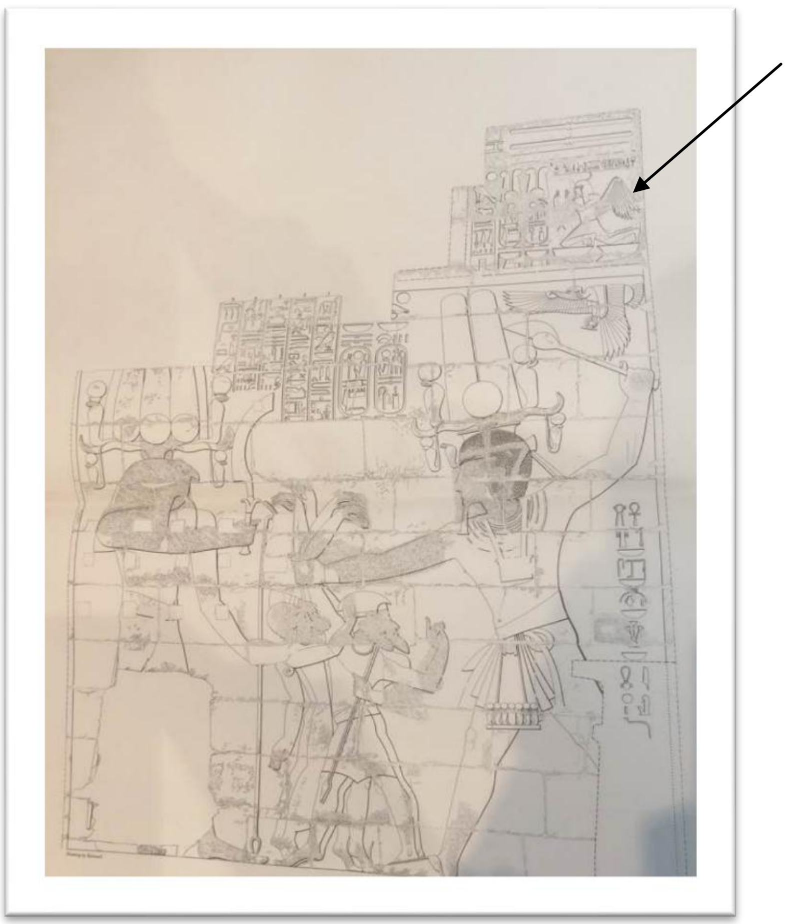
Iskander, *The Temple of Ramesses II in Abydos*, p. 464, pl. 5-1.

Four rekhyt figures in human form with the pointed crest of the lapwing.

[16] Nibbi, *Lapwings and Libyans in Ancient Egypt*, p. 44.
[17] Iskander, *The Temple of Ramesses II in Abydos*, P. 464-465.

F. Human body in knelling position with two upraised arms for adoring with a crest of the rekhyt on the top of the head and two out stretching wings of the rekhyt..

This form of the rekhyt bird was very unique form.This form appeared only during 20th dynasty. In this form king Ramses III appeared in knelling position with upraised arms with the crest and the wings of the rekhyt bird. After defeating the sea people king ramses III wants to say to the gods of Egypt that he is the representator of the Egyptians.[18] **we noticed that this is the first time that the rekhyt appeared in this form.**



King Ramses III in the rekhyt form (wings, pointed head) in front of his cartouches.

[18] The Eastern High Gate,V. viii, p. 5, Pl. 599.

G. Lion with the wings and the crest of the rekhyt bird on the top of the head.

This unique form of the rekhyt appeared during the new kingdom in the 18th dynasty. This form of the rekhyt has many indications:

- Power of the lion
- Rekhyt
- king

This form in general means that “the strong king of Egypt who has the loyalty of the Egyptians.[19]



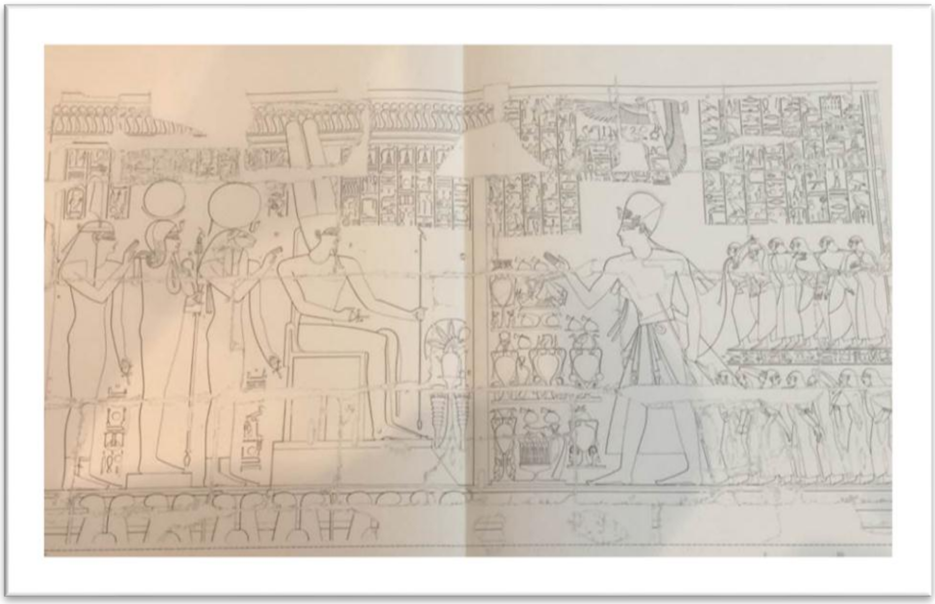
Nibbi, *Lapwings and Libyans in Ancient Egypt*, pl. Xiii.

Armlet sphinx of Queen Mutnodjeme half-sister of queen Nefertiti.

[19] Nibbi, *Lapwings and Libyans in Ancient Egypt*, p. 124, pl. Xiii.

H. Body of lion with human head and two out stretched wingsof the rekhyt bird with two upraised hands for adoration

This form appeared during the 19th dynasty, reign of king Seti I. The meaning of this form is to indicate the power of the king and the control over the Egyptian.[20]



Nelson, *Reliefs and inscriptions at Karnak*, P. 36.

King Seti I presenting Hittite prisoners and spoil to Members of the Theban triad and the goddess Maat.

[20] Nelson, *Reliefs and inscriptions at Karnak*, P. 36.

Conclusion

During the new kingdom the rekhyt bird had many forms. Each form has its purpose and indication like the following:

Bird with two out stretched wings over *nb* sign.

This form appeared specially during the 18th dynasty. In this form the rekhyt appeared as a bird over "nb" sign which means all. The rekhyt appeared with two out stretched wings which refers to the loyalty and the respect.This form means " all people are under the control and pay loyalty to the king.

Human body over *nb* sign with the head of the rekhyt bird.

This form represented new form of the rekhyt bird appeared during the new kingdom. In this form the rekhyt had human body standing over nb sign. In this form the rekhyt had two upraised arms for adoring.

Bird

This form of the rekhyt was the main form of the rekhyt bird during the old and the middle kingdom. This form appeared rarly during the new kingdom as I mentioned. This form of the rekhyt bird appeared during the 18th,19th dynasty. The main purpose of this form of the rekhyt bird was to refer to the rekhyt people. It gives us the idea of the loyalty and the control.

Bird with two out stretched wings over *nb* sign with two upraised arms for adoration.

This form of the rekhyt bird was the most form appeared during the new kingdom. This form of the rekhyt bird was called "rekhyt rebus" which means that a photo can be read as phrase. The all scene means "all people worship". This form appeared during the new kingdom especially 18th, 19th dynasty. The first appearance of this form was the new kingdom.

Human figure with two upraised hands for adoring over *nb* sign with the crest of the rekhyt bird on the head.

This form of the rekhyt bird appeared during the new kingdom specially the 19th dynasty. In this form human figure appeared with two arms raised over "nb" sign with the crest of the rekhyt bird on the top of the head. The crest which appeared on the top of the head refers to the rekhyt bird that means this human figure refers to the rekhyt.

Human body in knelling position with two upraised arms for adoring with a crest of the rekhyt on the top of the head and two out stretching wings of the rekhyt.

This form of the rekhyt bird was very unique form. This form appeared only during 20th dynasty. In this form king ramses III appeared in knelling position with upraised arms with the crest and the wings of the rekhyt bird.After defeating the sea people king ramses III wants to say to the gods of Egypt that he is the representator of the Egyptians. We noticed that this is the first time that the rekhyt appeared in this form.

Lion with the wings and the crest of the rekhyt bird on the top of the head.

This unique form of therekhyt appeared during the new kingdom in the 18th dynasty. This form in general means that " the strong king of Egypt who has the loyalty of the Egyptians.

Body of lion with human head and two out stretched wingsof the rekhyt bird with two upraised hands for adoration.

This form appeared during the 19th dynasty, reign of king seti I. The meaning of this form is to indicate the power of the king and the control over the Egyptians.

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أشكال طائر الرخيت خلال الدولة الحديثة

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الملخص العربى

طائر الرخيت هو أحد الطيور التي ظهرت في الحضارة المصرية القديمة. هذا الطائر كان له دلالة هامة في الحضارة المصرية القديمة. بعض العلماء اقترحوا أنه يدل علي الطبقة العامة من المصريين، والبعض الآخر اعتقد أنه يدل علي الأعداء، وبعضهم اعتقد أنه يدل علي الليبين. لذلك تلقي هذه الدراسة الضوء علي هذا الطائر والمغزي من ظهوره في الحضارة المصرية القديمة.

الكلمات الدالة: طائر، الرخيت، مصر القديمة.